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# LIVING SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY

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## PREAMBLE

The General Chapter of 2004 at Torre d'Aguilha saw as its main objective, to reactivate, revitalize the gift that the Congregation had originally received from God, the charism. The first and most important document produced by that chapter is about our spiritual renewal. The task is beyond the scope of any one document. The spiritual renewal of the members of the Congregation is happening on many fronts. The present ID simply wants to help a little to move the work of our spiritual renewal forward. We are trying to provide a tool for reflection at personal and community levels.

## I. WE NEED TO DEEPEN OUR SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY

### The World

We live in a world of great challenges. This is clear in various spheres of life. There is a steady rise in the number of people who go on pilgrimage to religious places or visit religious monuments, even if we speak of today's secularized humanity. This activity in various religious traditions explains the deep hunger for God and the consequent search that characterizes humanity<sup>1</sup>. The search for God has been a religious activity since our creation.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, about five million people make a pilgrimage to Lourdes annually and four million to Fatima and all who go to Rome. The number of pilgrims who made the Muslim hajj to Mecca this year was put at two million. Other places such as Aparecida, Guadalupe, Medjugorie, Knock, etc. welcome thousands of people each year. Diocesan pilgrimage centres witness many pilgrims annually.

Theological anthropology confirms that we are made with a “capacity for God”. The psalmist compares the yearning of humanity for God with the deer that yearns for running streams (Ps 41, 1). We speak of the growing phenomenon of people “believing without belonging” in the so called western countries. Young people want some sort of spirituality not doctrine. In the economically deprived countries of the so-called South the preaching of “prosperity religion” has become more attractive, and those Churches that offer it are attracting many followers. In the eastern countries, home to the world’s great religions, despite the influence of materialism and campaigns against religion the thirst for spirituality continues to grow. This notwithstanding, many people end up taking shelter in various forms of intolerance, fanaticism, fundamentalism and spiritualism, often with catastrophic results.

On the other hand, modernity with its technological advances and digital revolution has brought not only speed to the scale of everyday activities but has undoubtedly raised the standard of living. At the same time, we stand ashamed by the situation of abject poverty lived by a greater percentage of humanity and the frightening imbalance in the social order. Somehow we live in a world with a serious lack of deeper values that define our commitment to each other and to the environment in which we live. The General Chapters of Maynooth and Torre d’Aguilha made us more aware of this growing reality<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Congregation in the Church**

*T*his is no doubt the new context of our religious and missionary life. Some people have lost confidence in the Church and its leaders due to the cases of scandal and related stories. Some of our religious missionaries struggle with

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<sup>2</sup> See Superior General’s Reports to General Chapters at Maynooth and Torre d’Aguilha.

personal insecurity while others continue to minister in areas with lack of a supportive faith environment. We have lost confreres who personally decided to leave the Congregation. These departures have disturbed us and we have wondered what we are not doing right. But we have not remained lethargic! Like other religious families, we have been active in revitalizing our spiritual traditions in order to respond to the needs of our time. We joined the wave of renewal which flowed from Vatican II with its programme of *aggiornamento*! We re-wrote our Rules and Constitutions and published documents purposefully geared towards spiritual renewal<sup>3</sup>. We continue to reflect on our consecrated life and apostolic mission in its various aspects. We took the opportunity of the Spiritan Jubilee Year to look at our past and its history and gained inspiration for our future. We continue to engage in personal and community recollections and retreats. Many are those who take up sabbatical programmes for their personal updating and renewal in order to be more effective in their ministries. All these efforts and many more are an indication that spiritual renewal is an on-going project for the individual confrere and for the community.

## Challenges

All of the above have direct implications for a renewed spirituality that would respond to today's situation. The tendency, however, is to get overly focused on the difficulties and to give little time to delving deeper into what makes us who we are and the meaning of the events that confront us. Overwhelmed by the negative trends in society, we easily lose sight of their life-giving opportunities. The voice of God calls us to reach back to the roots of our faith, the Good News preached by Jesus Christ and the rich heritage of our Founders

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<sup>3</sup> The following ID; "Towards a Missionary Spirituality for Today", ID/40, Dec. 1985, is a great resource on Spiritan apostolic spirituality.

in order to find meaning, strength, and solidarity (cf. 1Kg 19, 15). We need to rediscover the “apostolic life” as envisaged by our founders. They left us a great heritage at the heart of which is our commitment to the poor. In line with this, confreres expressed a desire to return to a deeper understanding of our consecration and to rediscover the centrality of our personal consecration to God through religious life, lived according to the Spiritan charism (TA 0.2.2)<sup>4</sup>. We attempted a re-focusing at Torre d'Aguilha. It was in many ways a Chapter that devoted time to reflect on ourselves and our spiritual heritage. Consistent with the traditions of our founders, it emphasized the vital importance of personal and community prayer if we are to be in touch with God’s action in the world. It underlined the importance of cultivating a balanced regular lifestyle of prayer, work, reflection, rest (TA 1.3.7) and the ability to deal with conflict and misunderstanding in community. Whilst insisting on being aware of our strengths and weaknesses, it called our attention to the vital importance of human and spiritual formation at all stages in our formation programmes. It reminded us of the core values that should characterize our spirituality of mission today. Notably, it spoke to us of elements such as option in favour of the poor (TA 1.1.4), service and respect for others (TA 1.1.5), practical solidarity with the people among whom we live and among ourselves (TA 5.2), presence among cultures, calling for human equality (TA 5.1), and pilgrimage of mutual enrichment (TA 0.2.1). We are eager to keep this “Spiritan fire” burning.

### Is There a Spiritan Spirituality?

*I*s there in fact a Spiritan Spirituality? Talk about a Spiritan Spirituality is recent. For a long time it was implicit. Up until Vatican II the members of the Congregation did not talk

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<sup>4</sup> This reflection is contained in the responses received to the pre-capitular questionnaire that gave rise to the document “Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism Today”.

about the “charism”. It is still legitimate to ask if there is what can properly be called Spiritan spirituality. The two congregations which amalgamated in 1848 grew up at the heart of the Catholic Church. Many other congregations were developing. A big number of spiritualities influenced Poullart des Places and Libermann.

After Vatican II which asked religious institutes to go back to their roots, we Spiritans were led to look at our beginnings and sources. Looking at the writings of our founders and our response to mission situations over the generations, we became aware that despite our enrichment from many other sources we do indeed have a spirituality that can be called ‘Spiritan’. As well as this identifiable spirituality, it is also evident that despite the high number of Congregations ‘opting’ for the poor, as we say we do, there is also an identifiable Spiritan charism, a particular Spiritan approach. It is often lay people who make us more aware of this reality. This spirituality and charism are encapsulated for us in the opening words of our Rule of Life taken from Luke’s Gospel. (Lk. 4.18) *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me, to bring the Good News to the afflicted...”*

A double reality is present in our consecration; a deep communion with God and the call to serve others especially the poor. When God chooses anyone, he enters into a special relationship with the person for a particular purpose. This did not happen only to the kings, priests and prophets of old but it happens to us even now. This is our consecration.

## II. “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME...”

### The Spiritan Is One Who Finds His Strength in God

Spiritan history shows the **great ardour** of the pioneers, in the founding of local churches and in multiple works

created for the service of peoples. The immense task was not done by half-measures. They did however, sometimes, run the risk of rushing in headlong to the point of identifying themselves totally with "their work". This is a danger for everybody. Poullart des Places went through a similar experience. *"I was taking stock of myself and realizing that I was a long way from arriving*

*where I should have arrived."* And the admission is bitter: *"Alas! I am only a mask of devotion and the shadow of what I have been"* before concluding: *"What good does it do me to have done what I have done?"* This painful question still arises today, when the enthusiasm of the beginnings dries up.

The bitterness of Libermann also shows when he becomes aware of the slipping of some people. How to adjust the double desire of doing effective missionary activity and putting oneself at the will of God? A Spiritan is not a monk! Libermann knew that well. But, the value of work did not depend primarily on activity, any more than today it would not depend on the number of meetings on one's agenda. If God has no place, if his love no longer nourishes the love of the missionary for his contemporaries, he becomes a mere "clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13,1).

To explain this reality, Libermann crafted the expression ***"practical union"***. Does it not express his own experience, when, trying to untangle all sorts of difficulties, he kept a great serenity, fruit of an unshakable trust in God! His secret? **Accepting the grace of God** and acting only under its inspiration. For Libermann it is essentially a question of relying

on “the fidelity of divine grace, which produces our union with God in our acts” (E.S. p. 556).

In a certain way the missionary must be like a fish in water! The fish can only evolve harmoniously supported by the water. It finds in it what is essential for its life. In this way the one whose heart is in God can go forward, crossing calm or stormy waters. Whatever the moment, the missionary learns to **live with God**. The soul “filled with God, knows how to be patient like God; it does not want success, either greater or faster than God wants it; it examines the state of things calmly and in the spirit of God; it acts according to the lights and the strengths which it gets from above, and leaves to its divine Master the concern to make its works fruitful according to the measure of his divine mercy on them” (ND IX, p. 328-329).

### Spiritane Life Is a Life of Prayer and Apostolic Service

*A*nd prayer in all of this? Has it become superfluous because of the presence of God at the heart of action? There is the danger of forgetting essential moments given to prayer. From the start the Seminary of the Holy Spirit lived in the rhythm of the divine office, like the vital breathing of the community. It is the same in the Rule written by Libermann. For him “practical union” does not suppress prayer. Quite the contrary, “**prayer, that’s the big thing**”, he writes to Mr. Collin while inviting him to pray with simplicity. He describes it as “a habit of the soul which considers itself as such before Him, and which, during the time of prayer, keeps itself separated from everything, to manifest to the divine Lord what it is to him” (ND VII p. 37). Living before God begins with prayer and is prolonged naturally in work and fraternal life. How many times did Libermann not recommend examining a difficult question before God? He advised others to do it because he used to do it himself.



## The Spiritan Is One Who Lives In Community

Prayer nourishes the life of the community and the mission which it has received. Libermann knew how essential it was to favour mutual understanding. For him *“the life of our missionaries is a community life; they must never remain isolated”* (ND VI, p. 438). But, he also knew the difficulties due to character. For communities to be *“cor unum et anima una”*, the **ferment of prayer**, the point of departure and arrival of all missionary activity was needed. Prayer is God interacting with me, to pull me God-wards, away from myself to community, to mission which generates community. Evangelization is done to generate Christian community. Community is the way we do mission. It is by living community that we exhibit the objective of mission. Christian community is mission maturing. Spiritan community life points in the direction we are urging people to go. Nobody will follow a guide on a path where the guide will not go. In the early days a Dominican community was called a **sacra praedicatio**, a holy preaching. To live together as brothers ‘with one heart and one mind’ was a preaching, before one said a single word.

*Does our community life inspire people  
to become community?*

## Spiritan Spirituality Is About Contemplation and Action

The real missionary is a contemplative in action. At Torre d'Aguilha we were moved by an account about a confrere who spent his life with the poor in Brazil and found God in them<sup>5</sup>. A true son of Libermann, Angelo van Kempen recognized in the poor his masters and teachers. From the vantage point of the poor, he understood that to love the poor means to move your social location, your class mentality and even your clerical mentality in order to be with them. He

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<sup>5</sup> See Spiritan Life 15 pg 111ff. for a detailed presentation.

welcomed the poor in the same way as he welcomed the rich. He used to say, "When you welcome all in the same way, the rich feel offended and the poor don't know what is happening". The account said this about him; "Contemplation in action: Angelo would have smiled at these very pompous words if they were used to describe his life. However, he was without any doubt a contemplative in action. He found God in the poor; all of his life was directed towards them. They were the narrow door through which, daily, he entered the Reign of God". His experience of the poor made him into a contemplative who incarnated himself in the world of the poor and listened attentively to them. The Holy Father speaks of contemplation as the basis of service. He quotes from the *Pastoral Rule* of Pope Gregory the Great, "the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 7).

### III. "...HAS SENT ME..."

#### To Be Spiritan Is To Be Available

**I**n order to witness to Christ, the missionaries are asked **to be available**. Availability at all times characterizes the Congregation. Poullart des Places envisaged for Holy Spirit students, "*the most burdensome places, the most abandoned functions, and for this reason, the most difficult to fill*". Libermann also envisaged it for his missionaries later on (cf. SRL 4 & 12). In fact, our religious family has inspiring stories to tell about circumscriptions and confreres who incarnated this Spiritan charism in their lives and work. Individually the Spiritan tries to seize "*God's moment*". Far from building himself up and following his personal undertakings, he abandons himself to what God asks him to do through the Congregation. He tries to

strike a balance between missionary imperatives and his necessary self-fulfilment.

Availability for mission is essentially docility **to the Holy Spirit**. It is not surprising that our Founders emphasized devotion to the Holy Spirit. *"All the students will particularly adore the Holy Spirit to whom they are especially devoted"* (Reg. of Poullart des Places, art. 1). A century and a half later Libermann echoes this: *"The Congregation consecrates them especially to the Holy Spirit, author and achiever of all holiness and inspirer of apostolic action"* (Rule of 1849, ND X p. 568). Devotion to the Holy Spirit, according to Libermann, is a source of happiness and a wellspring of love. He writes, *"O my dear friend, how happy we are when we are in the divine Spirit's power, under the total influence of the spirit of Jesus' love! Everything becomes love within us: all our actions, even the slightest movement of our soul, its most intimate movements and emotions even more so – all is love"* (To M. Douay, Dec. 31, 1841). A prayer came to him spontaneously when he was commenting on John 3,8: *"O divine Spirit I want to be light as a feather before you, so that your breath may carry me where it wishes and may I never put up the least resistance to it"*.

Openness, availability and docility to the Holy Spirit are identity marks of Spiritan spirituality. Not that the one sent can do whatever they feel like doing! But, because they abandon themselves to the presence of God and the action of the Spirit, they are able to discern with their brothers and sisters and with

the help of their superiors where the Spirit is leading them. Openness of oneself to the Spirit engenders hope. We expressed this conviction at the 2004 General Chapter when we said that “new life is possible for those who are open to the Spirit” (TA 5.4.1).

### To Be Spiritan Is To Be Sent

*T*hroughout the years, concern for mission has forged Spiritan consciousness. **To be Spiritan is to be sent.** This reality is at the basis of our spirituality. As people who are sent, no one claims to be their own master. Effectively it is for each Spiritan to welcome an undertaking that is beyond him: “*Our mission is his*”, writes Libermann (ES p. 374), referring to the mission of Christ himself. Having ten years of experience since the founding of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, through all sorts of difficulties, he knows that if the Congregation is worth anything, it is only by its attachment to the Master of the harvest who sends us on mission. This fact of being sent makes us into “apostles” whose vocation can only happen thanks to our life of holiness. Nobody will deny that we need to seek certain effectiveness in our apostolic commitment. But, a Congregation does not look for results as a company calculates the returns on its investment. In fact, to make the announcing of the Good News credible, Libermann presents a method; the method of holiness! He wrote to Mr. Lairé in 1851: “*Your main preaching is in a holy life...Be saints, committing all your members to being so, the salvation of souls depends on that*” (ND XIII, p. 143).

### Spiritan Spirituality Is About Pilgrimage

*T*he pilgrim is one who sets out in search of a greater value responding to an inner need. The starting point of this search is the recognition of one’s inadequacy, hunger or emptiness. The pilgrim sets out with a conviction on this faith-

journey even in difficult circumstances for gifts of enduring value. But this journey even if it often involves a geographical relocation, does not always require it. It is also a spiritual relocation, a journey on roads that lead to one's heart. We Spiritans undertake this journey ourselves and at the same time accompany those to whom we are sent. Our 300 year history is a remarkable demonstration of what the Spirit has done with us. The Holy Spirit is the real protagonist in this pilgrimage of our missionary activities. Torre d'Aguilha summarized our style of mission beautifully, "conscious that Christ's Spirit is already present and active in the cultures to which we are sent, mission becomes a pilgrimage of mutual enrichment, where together we identify and seek liberation from the chains that impede the full realization of God's Kingdom". It added, "This understanding of mission today requires of missionaries a deeper and more contemplative spirituality" (TA 0.2.1). As pilgrims, we go through a certain *kenosis*, a certain self-emptying in order to identify with those to whom we are sent and who from time to time show us the way to take. Libermann reminded his missionaries to "*become Negro with the Negroes, to form them appropriately, not in the European manner but leaving them what belongs to them*".

***What does 'becoming Negro with the  
Negroes' mean for us/me today?***

### **Spiritans Spirituality Is About Dialogue**

**A**fter the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation rediscovered dialogue with other religions as an important element of its mission (SRL 16.3). In this measure it was reassured by the initiative of John-Paul II, when he invited the leaders of the great religions to meet and pray. At a time when reality has been labelled the "clash of civilizations", some people go down this road, giving priority to meeting, dialogue, the call for collaboration and mutual respect in our differences

for the building up of a world where the spiritual dimension of humanity is not omitted (TA p. 107). Our confreres who live and work in areas where the population is Muslim in the majority, have discovered that the best dialogue is 'dialogue of life', which consists in doing things together which all can agree about.

Such a missionary presence does not focus on tangible results such as the number of baptisms or marriages. It is about the long term, which alone allows the build-up of relations of mutual respect. It accepts a humble service of people: with them the missionary becomes aware with gratitude that God increases his kingdom in the lives of those who believe in other ways. It is nourished by daily prayer and the Eucharist, where the Spiritan meets the God of the new Covenant who makes no distinction between people (Acts 10, 35).

*Do we have the patience to live and work  
among people who do not share our faith, in  
a long term 'dialogue of life'?*

#### IV. "... TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR..."

##### **Spiritan Spirituality Is About Service**

Torre d'Aguilha (1.1.5) insisted that central to the Spiritan vocation is service to others. Service to others also implies a deep respect for them. In fact, respect for someone is a prerequisite for a genuine service. Jesus enjoins us to revolutionize our concept of power by extricating all nuances of individualism, paternalism and authoritarianism. "I am among you as one who serves", he said. Our Rule of Life reminds us that whatever we possess is for the service of others (SRL 72). Because of the juxtaposition of service and power, we must be careful on this point. The power that our education and broad experience give us can help us in our work with the

poor, but they can also blind us. It is helpful to keep in mind the words of Christ; “we are useless servants” (Lk. 17:10). Working in 23 out of the 42 most heavily indebted countries in the world, we are in places where poverty, misery, sickness, etc. abound. Benedict XVI reminds those who are able to help: “We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 35).

*What is our attitude to the people we serve?*

### **To Be Spiritan Is To Be a Servant of the Poor and Those Who Suffer**

The poverty of populations is an endemic evil with many faces. It has touched numerous founders of congregations and has led them to make **concrete responses** to the problems of their time. This is true for Poullart des Places at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the poor students and for Libermann in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the black populations. Bishop Shanahan in Nigeria, Fr. Laval in Mauritius and Fr. Brottier in Paris did not fail to be all things to the poor. Many Spiritans have responded in various ways to alleviate the situation of poverty. They have been close to the poor as an integral part of their pastoral ministry either in parishes or in educational institutions and some have set up recognized structures with the sole purpose of giving dignity to the poor<sup>6</sup>. The experience of our confreres and other great friends of the poor has drawn them from beginning to work at the spiritual level only, to try to help socially. For example at the beginning of the Auteuil Orphanage in Paris Fr. Roussel was preparing

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<sup>6</sup> We think of works founded by Spiritans such as Concern, SERVOL, World Mercy, CEPAC, KAIROS, SPIRASI, Notel, Movimento de Defesa dos Favelados, etc. We also remember the involvement of Spiritans in providing support to the victims of war situations in Nigeria in the 1960s, the famine in Ethiopia in the 1970s, etc. These interventions saved millions of people. Many other examples could be quoted including congregations whose foundation was inspired by Spiritans.

orphans for First communion, a moment of great social and ecclesial integration at that time. He moved on from dealing with this need to try to help those young people to learn a trade and become capable of earning a dignified living and become even more at home in society. We all know how wonderfully Brottier took this dual dimension forward. In other cases confreres have begun with the social needs of the poor and later moved on to their spiritual needs as well. Our service of the poor always has these dual dimensions.

In our world today where rich and glittering façades tend to hide refugees, displaced persons, the traumatized victims of war, AIDS victims, environmental degradation and increasing social and economic inequality, Spiritans are moved with a deeper compassion in favour of those who suffer. Our Rule of Life clearly reminds us that commitment to the poor is “a constitutive part of our mission of evangelization” (SRL 14). Our founders made it clear that speeches and homilies are not enough to curb the plague of poverty and misery. Libermann instructed his missionaries to respond concretely: *“They will get them every help and care they can without much examining whether they deserve it or not”* (ND X, p. 516). In the same Rule of 1849, Libermann adds: *“They will give every service to the poor even the*

*hardest and most disgusting, and will do all of that with cordiality and light heartedness”* (ib. p. 516). The **sense of service**, therefore, characterizes all Spiritan action. By inviting the Spiritans of Dakar and Gabon to be with the populations “like servants to their masters” (ND IX, p. 330), Libermann brings out the spiritual motivation of every commitment. The Rule of



1849 recalls it: *"We consider ourselves their servants, we devote all our lives to them, according to the plans of the divine Master"* (ND X, p. 515). This is not possible without "eyes fixed" on Jesus Christ himself, the source of all apostolate, he who did not "come to be served but to serve" (Mk. 10,45).

***Do we really serve the poor with respect, treating them as equals, without condescension or paternalism or do we run from the poor because we come from poor backgrounds?***

### Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

More and more we are discovering ourselves in our original dynamism. Libermann says of his sons and daughters, you shall be "the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them" (Rule of 1849; N.D. X, 517). This is a constitutive part of our Spiritan identity. Our evangelizing mission to humanity would be woefully incomplete without "the 'integral liberation' of people, action for justice and peace and participation in development" (SRL 14). Torre d'Aguilha affirms that "it is the option for the poor that makes us different in a society that excludes large sections of the population" (1.1.4).

Poverty is still the greatest problem today. Hunger is the greatest annual killer on the planet. Recent statistics reveal that 860 million children live in dire straits, victims of a variety of tragedies and abuses.

As a Congregation we are present in many areas of the world with huge challenges. The global fight against poverty and hunger mobilizes us. The polarization between the so-called Christian West and the Muslim world is a burning global issue at the present moment. Faced with these challenges, we also

aspire to be part of the fight against AIDS. We work alongside those who seek peace, reconciliation and healing of people in post-war situations. If we are to be effective, we need to be clear about what we stand for and what is important to us. There is no doubt that our “option for the poor” has huge implications for our lifestyle, for where we live and what works we take on. In fact, the question remains,

***“What is the profile of the Spiritan in our world today”? Where lies our treasure and where is our heart?***

Torre d'Aguilha reminded us of what Maynooth had asked of each circumscription; to draw up a plan of action for justice and peace (Maynooth 2,17; TA 3.2). This communal exercise could lead us towards a deeper appreciation of our Spiritan identity considering the myriad issues of injustice calling for our attention.

At the level of the Congregation, we realize that we need to team up with others in order to have a stronger voice that speaks with voiceless and disadvantaged people. It is said that the act of lobbying in favour of the poor is an element of spirituality! Lobbying is the prophetic effort one makes to magnify the voice of others or to make someone's voice heard. In the sophistications of today's society, there is need to complement our efforts with networking and advocacy. This way of doing things is recognition that there is tremendous strength in unity. Torre d'Aguilha declared that, “Collaboration with other groups and organizations will be central to our efforts to defend the poor and marginalized and to promote their rights. Of special importance here is networking, lobbying and advocacy” (TA 3.4). It is in response to this that in July 2005 we joined with six other missionary congregations in the VIVAT project. This will give us the possibility of forming part of a strong worldwide network of advocacy and lobbying, working for structural change and

better and more just governance at different levels. Such levels include the United Nations in New York but also in other places where the UN has offices to cater for specific areas e.g. the Human Rights Commission (Geneva) or the United Nations Environment Programme (Nairobi). As a missionary congregation it will give us the possibility of bringing grassroots concerns, suggestions, issues, problems and injustices in places and from people with whom we work to the international settings in which important decisions, policies and agreements are made.

### **Spiritan Spirituality Is About Solidarity**

Solidarity has been at the centre of Spiritan missionary spirituality since the beginnings. At Maynooth we saw solidarity as an essential dimension of the way we relate to people and neglected groups and also live our vow of poverty. Solidarity beckons us to go closer to people among whom we live, especially those who are the most vulnerable, poor and excluded from society (Maynooth 2.2). We also traced the development of the concept and practice of solidarity without legislating it<sup>7</sup>. Torre d'Aguilha confirmed these reflections when it said that solidarity is not only the fact of being at the side of the suffering poor but also being at the side of our own confreres. What is the use of choosing one and neglecting the other? The time has come for a greater solidarity in the one big Spiritan family<sup>8</sup>. When solidarity is lived it is evident in teamwork and listening, and even in coordinating meetings, planning, evaluating, and motivating people. When we lack these skills, we tend to be authoritarian and paternalistic in our ministry (TA 1.1.5). This is another way of looking at collaboration in ministry. It is a source of joy and challenge<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter document, « Solidarity and Autonomy », Maynooth, 128, 136

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter document, “One Big Family”, Torre d'Aguilha, 93f.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter document “Joys and Challenges of Older Circumscriptions”. Torre d'Aguilha, 57f.

The demographical reality of our Congregation with its ever increasing international and intercultural communities brings home to us that solidarity remains for each Spiritan a great challenge.

*Is solidarity in our community blocked by individualism?*

## V. THE SPIRITAN IS “OF ONE HEART WITH MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS” (ACTS 1, 14)

Let us imagine a superimposed photo-montage. In the background we have the Jerusalem community at prayer with Mary waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1,14). In the foreground are twelve people, eleven students and Poullart des Places on Pentecost Sunday 1703, at the feet of Our Lady of Rescue (Black Virgin; N.D. de Bonne Délivrance). In the two stories, from the Acts of the Apostles and the foundation of the Holy Spirit Seminary, Mary has a kind of catalyzing role. She guides people’s hearts towards the Holy Spirit who inspires prayer, drives them into action and unifies the community.

Spiritan spirituality sees itself in the explicit link which the New Testament makes between **Mary and the Holy Spirit**. Libermann will continue what was begun by Poullart des Places. In the Rule of 1849, he clearly explains how Mary inspires the missionary life: The Heart of Mary is “*like a perfect model of fidelity to all the holy inspirations of the divine Spirit and of the interior practice of the virtues of the religious apostolic life*” (ND X, p. 568). Libermann proposes therefore to follow her example. Had he not experienced her beneficent presence? In all situations, from the simplest to the most difficult, he turned to Mary: with her, everything became easy.

## VI. HANDING ON THE SPIRITAN CHARISM

The Chapter at Torre d'Aguilha reminded us that in the Congregation as in the Church, the challenge today is the renewal of the missionary. We would not be exaggerating to conclude that there is a deep thirst in our religious family for what makes us Spiritans. Delegates at Torre d'Aguilha were extremely sensitive to this felt need.

As a Congregation, we have responded to the needs by setting up the **Centre for Spiritan Studies** at Duquesne University. In its infancy, this pioneering work already bears the seeds of many possibilities<sup>10</sup>. The time is here when we need to create a new generation of experts in Spiritan spirituality. We need to identify confreres who are attracted by the mystique of our founders, passionate for Spiritan sources and spirituality, and are ready to invest their time and energy for training in Spiritan spirituality. The obvious challenge facing us is that we can only share this spiritual legacy when we have people who incarnate it in their lifestyle and mission. How can they incarnate it unless there are those with the ability to facilitate it, especially in our formation communities? This is a responsibility for each circumscription. This commitment and increased investment in developing our spiritual heritage and making sure that we can hand it on effectively to Spiritans and others with an interest in it is obvious from the number of Spiritan spirituality centres now in place or being put in place. Some of these centres are in Mauritius, Bagamoyo in Tanzania, Brazzaville, SIST in Nigeria, the Centre Libermann in Saverne, France and Silva in Portugal.

*Are we investing in our Spiritan heritage and its handing on in our community / circumscription?*

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<sup>10</sup> See Spiritan Newsflash No. 141 (January 2006)